

CHAPTER XXX

THE FINAL DECISION

ON the 22nd November, the very day that Lord Kitchener Nov. advised the Government to evacuate Suvla and Anzac, the General Staff in London completed a memorandum for the War Committee in precisely the same sense.

The General Staff believed that, if all commitments in other theatres were reduced, a sustained effort on the Western front in the spring of 1916 would attain "a considerable and perhaps "decisive success". They suggested that the arguments of those in favour of remaining on the peninsula were mostly founded on conjecture or sentiment, whereas the arguments in favour of withdrawal were all based on "cold calculations of "military strategy". Evacuation, it was admitted, might certainly cost 50,000 men; but, if the troops who would otherwise be lost on the peninsula from battle casualties and sickness were taken into account, immediate withdrawal would make the Allies on the Western front 140,000 stronger in the spring of 1916 than if Gallipoli were held throughout the winter.

Disinclined to believe that evacuation would jeopardize the safety of Egypt, the General Staff argued that the loss of British prestige would be far greater if we were eventually driven from the peninsula, or if, by remaining there, we ruined the chance of success in the West. If the Straits could still be opened "the result would be worth great efforts", but as this was apparently no longer possible the main object for which the campaign had been undertaken no longer existed. A force besieged in Gallipoli could neither contain large Turkish forces nor exert any influence on the course of events in the main theatre of war. So the General Staff recommended evacuation "with the possible exception of Helles"¹

¹ The Admiralty had urged the retention of Helles in order to facilitate the protection of British shipping in the Mediterranean from submarine attack. German submarines could not maintain themselves in that region for more than two months without the dockyard facilities which existed only in Adriatic ports and at Constantinople. Great efforts were being made by

Nov. This memorandum, as well as Lord Kitchener's telegram, was considered on the 23rd November by the War Committee, who there and then decided to advise the Cabinet on military grounds to evacuate the whole peninsula despite "the grave political disadvantages which may arise from this decision". The Committee rejected the plea for the retention of Cape Helles, in the belief that the naval arguments in favour of this course were not commensurate with the military disadvantages.¹

The proposal to evacuate the peninsula now had the approval of Sir Charles Monro, Lord Kitchener, all the corps commanders at the Dardanelles, the General Staff at the War Office, and the newly established War Committee. The crucial decision lay, however, with the Cabinet, and to take this decision a Cabinet Council was held the following day.

But it is always more easy to recommend than to assume the final responsibility for any important decision; and the question now to be decided, affecting, as it probably might, not only the lives of tens of thousands of brave men in Gallipoli, but the course of the war and even the fate of the Empire, was as desperate a problem as any that faced the Government throughout the Great War. It had been made even more difficult by the telegram which the First Lord of the Admiralty had received overnight from Vice-Admiral de Robeck.²

At the Cabinet meeting, therefore, opinion was so divided by the complexity of the issues that no decision could be arrived at. Lord Curzon subsequently told the Dardanelles Commission that in the course of this meeting "he and several of his colleagues, anxious at least that the opposite side should be heard, and fearful of a decision fraught with such dire possibilities, pleaded for a few hours consideration" to enable him to state the arguments in favour of remaining on the peninsula.

This sanction being given, the vital decision was postponed, first for 48 hours to enable Lord Curzon to write his memorandum, and then, owing to the powerful case which he constructed, till a day in the following week. Meanwhile Admiral de Robeck

the Allies to close the Straits of Otranto, and if the Dardanelles could also be kept closed against the passage of enemy submarines the Admiralty believed that the menace to shipping in the Mediterranean could never be very serious.

¹ Dardanelles Commission. Final Report, p. 57.

By this date the Government as well as the General Staff had practically agreed that the Salonika campaign could effect no useful purpose, and that the divisions already landed there should also be withdrawn.

² See Chapter XXIX.

had started home on leave, and Admiral Wemyss, who had Nov. assumed command of the fleet, had telegraphed to the First Lord, pointing out the grave danger of an evacuation from a naval point of view, imploring him to re-open the whole question, and insisting on the ability of the fleet, even at that late hour, to save the situation by forcing the Dardanelles.

Lord Curzon's arguments for remaining on the peninsula were undeniably strong. It is easy to realize how deep an impression they made on the civilian members of the Cabinet—especially in view of Admiral Wemyss's telegram; and as the memorandum embraced almost the whole case of the opponents to evacuation, it must be examined in some detail.

Lord Curzon urged that the question of evacuation could not be decided on military grounds alone. Every political argument was opposed to the step, and in addition to "cold calculations of military strategy", it was essential to weigh the effect of a withdrawal on the morale of the British Army, the temper of the enemy, the spirit of the Allies, the fortunes of the war, and the destinies of the East.

He denied that there was any real concurrence of military opinion in favour of evacuation. Sir Charles Monro, he said, had made his recommendation after an extremely cursory glance at the peninsula and within 48 hours of his arrival. Other military authorities on the spot had changed their minds so frequently that the value of their judgment was materially affected and there was no certainty that a week hence they might not pronounce an entirely different verdict. On the 2nd November General Birdwood was opposed to evacuation, but on the 22nd he was said to consider it inevitable. General Davies on 2nd November was in favour of evacuation, but on the 17th November wanted to retain Helles. Lord Kitchener had started by refusing to consider evacuation; on the 15th he had reported that the positions could be held even against increased ammunition; but on the 22nd he, too, had agreed that evacuation was inevitable. These changes, Lord Curzon insisted, went to show that even the military case was so evenly balanced that judgments tended to oscillate from day to day. Of other professional authorities, Admiral de Robeck was in favour of holding on, and Sir Ian Hamilton, who knew the position better than any of the other generals consulted, was still an unshaken opponent of evacuation. Sir William Robertson advocated evacuation only on two conditions: first, it must be a feasible operation; secondly, it must not produce a situation which would necessitate the employment of a larger force elsewhere than was saved from the peninsula. But Lord Kitchener's

Nov. demands for the defence of Egypt¹ had already produced this second situation.

Lord Curzon suggested that transport difficulties made it unlikely that the Turks could bring up sufficient heavy guns and ammunition to render our positions on the peninsula untenable, and he believed that colder, healthier weather would greatly diminish our sick-rate. He doubted the prediction that a success could be gained in France in the spring of 1916 which would outweigh the ill-effects of evacuation. If there were no such victory Gallipoli would have been abandoned to no purpose.

Continuing his argument, Lord Curzon laid stress on the fact that the General Staff at the War Office were themselves of opinion that evacuation might result in the loss of 50,000 men. He asked the Cabinet to weigh the consequence of such a "piteous disaster", and, translating into words what the General Staff had expressed in figures, he drew a picture of what the scene might be if military expectations were realized on the night of the withdrawal:

I wish to draw it in no impressionist colours, but as it must in all probability actually arise. The evacuation and the final scenes will be enacted at night. Our guns will continue firing till the last moment . . . but the trenches will have been taken one by one, and a moment must come when a final *sauve qui peut* takes place, and when a disorganized crowd will press in despairing tumult on to the shore and into the boats. Shells will be falling and bullets ploughing their way into this mass of retreating humanity. . . . Conceive the crowding into the boats of thousands of half-crazy men, the swamping of craft, the nocturnal panic, the agony of the wounded, the hecatombs of slain. It requires no imagination to create a scene that, when it is told, will be burned into the hearts and consciences of the British people for generations to come.

In refutation of the General Staff's arguments, he argued that so long as our troops remained on the peninsula they constituted a direct threat to the Turkish capital, and would greatly reduce the Turkish numbers available for Mesopotamia or for an attack on the Suez Canal.

As regards the political effects of withdrawal Lord Curzon agreed that the fears about Egypt had been greatly exaggerated; but he urged that the Dominions would be exasperated, that Russia would be deeply distrustful and even perhaps antagonized. The heavy losses which everyone expected would affect the morale of the Indian Army, whilst Persia and Afghanistan

¹ Lord Kitchener had placed the defensive requirements of Egypt, after the evacuation of Gallipoli, at 14 divisions.

would be so impressed by this revelation of our weakness that Nov. trouble on the North-West Frontier was almost bound to follow.

In conclusion Lord Curzon urged that the peninsula could be and should be held throughout the winter months. As the Government had now practically decided to withdraw from Salonika, he suggested that the tired troops on the peninsula should be replaced as soon as possible by divisions from that port. Heavy drafts should be sent at once to Gallipoli; the defences should be strengthened by every possible means; and at the earliest possible moment a new landing should be made on the Asiatic shore with fresh troops from France, this to be coupled with a new attack from Suvla and a great naval attempt to force the Straits.

In addition to Lord Curzon's memorandum, the Government were given an appreciation which, by the express order of the Prime Minister, had been prepared by Lieut.-Colonel Hankey, the Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence.

Colonel Hankey pointed out that the evacuation of the peninsula would enable Germany to obtain her ambition of increasing our difficulties in the East without any effort at all on her part. The cessation of strategic pressure against the Turkish capital would free the whole Turkish army to attack in Mesopotamia, the Caucasus, or Egypt; and Britain and Russia, on the outside of the circle, would have to be strong everywhere to resist these possible attacks. Lord Kitchener was already asking for fourteen divisions to protect Egypt; four divisions and more would be required to hold our gains in Mesopotamia; Russia would have to reinforce her Caucasian front. Persia was already asking for more Russian troops to defend her territories, and was even hinting that, in case of refusal, she might have to join the Turks. More troops might be needed for the internal defence of India; and there was even a fear that Russia might sign a separate peace. Colonel Hankey urged that the arguments in favour of holding on in Gallipoli were overwhelming, *provided that it could be done*. "It so happens", his paper concluded, "that good divisions are about to be set free from Salonika, and the main plea of this paper is that the question may be considered from the point of view of their possible use to save the position on the Gallipoli peninsula, and, if possible, to take the offensive."

Meanwhile in Gallipoli it looked as if Nature herself was going to decide this much-debated issue by making it impossible for the army to leave the peninsula. Meteorological experts

Nov. had prophesied that November would be "glorious weather", and that though a few southerly storms might be expected, heavy gales and real winter weather need not be feared till the latter end of January. But these hopes were falsified. Already in the first three weeks of November a succession of gales had done considerable damage on all the beaches, and on the 26th General Davies again reported that the evacuation of Helles was out of the question till all his piers were repaired. The necessary work, he added, could not be completed for at least six weeks; and far from reducing the strength of the VIII Corps it was now essential to send him two more brigades and more ammunition, and to keep his existing cadres up to strength.

Finally, on the 27th, the situation took an even graver turn. A fierce south-westerly gale, which started on the afternoon of the 26th, veered next day to the north; it continued with exceptional violence for three days, and throughout that period it was impossible for any boat to approach the Gallipoli beaches.

The damage done by this storm was frankly alarming. At Kephalo Bay, Imbros, which was protected from all but north or north-easterly winds, a harbour for small craft had been formed by sinking three large ships to make a breakwater. On the afternoon of the 26th all the lighters and steamboats at Anzac were sent across to Imbros to shelter from the approaching gale. But the central ship of the breakwater was smashed to pieces by the storm; the sea rushing through the gap played havoc with the pier and jetty, and all the small craft, including a torpedo boat and a water-lighter, were sunk or blown ashore. At Suvla, where there was good protection from northerly winds, the piers and lighters escaped with comparatively little damage; but at Anzac and Helles the shore was strewn with wreckage, and the loss of small craft was so great that it was now more certain than ever that, even in a spell of fine weather, the evacuation of all three beaches at once was no longer a possibility.

For the troops in the trenches the three 'days' storm had been three days of agony. A violent thunderstorm on the evening of the 26th was followed by a torrential downpour which lasted for 24 hours and soaked the men to the skin. An icy hurricane then began to blow from the north; the rain turned first to a blinding blizzard, and then to heavy snow; and the snow was followed by two nights of exceptionally bitter frost.

At Anzac, thanks to the caves and underground galleries which the industry of the Australians and New Zealanders had completed in the summer months, a large number of the men were able to shelter from the storm; the front-line trenches

were protected to some extent by the surrounding hills; and Nov. though the sick-rate rose considerably, particularly amongst the Indian troops, the number of deaths from exposure was comparatively small. At Helles, too, where the trenches were mostly in sloping ground, they suffered little from flooding, and the troops bore the strain remarkably well.

The IX Corps at Suvla was far less fortunate in its positions. The troops on Kiretch Tepe were exposed to the unbroken fury of the storm, while those in the low-lying tracts had all their trenches flooded. The dry water-courses in the plain became rushing torrents, and on the southern flank, where the front-line defence across Azmak Dere consisted of a barricade, a wall of mud and water several feet high came rushing down the nullah, and drowned Turks and even pack ponies were washed into the British lines. Throughout the Suvla plain many sections of the trenches were uninhabitable, particularly in the area held by the 29th Division, and the unfortunate garrisons had to take refuge either on the parapets or in the sodden ground in rear. Owing to lack of material it had hitherto been impossible torevet the trenches. Many of the parapets now began to collapse, and by the morning of the 28th the central part of the position was held only by snipers. Fortunately the Turks were in no better case. They, too, had been flooded out, and in some parts of the line the suffering on both sides was so acute that the dazed and benumbed garrisons stood about in the open without firing, and for several hours there was an unofficial truce.

The nights of the 27th and 28th were nights of horror throughout the Suvla zone. In the front line many men had been drowned in the trenches. The severe cold following the floods proved an unbearable strain to men whose health had already been undermined by the hardships of the summer campaign. Hundreds were dying from exposure and the 86th Brigade was practically out of action. All over the plain streams of utterly exhausted men were struggling back to the beach, many collapsing on the roadside and freezing to death where they fell. The hospitals, ordnance tent, supply depots, and every place where any cover was available, were packed to overflowing; but more and more sick came pouring in, for whom no shelter could be found. Night and day the doctors struggled devotedly to grapple with the situation. But the suddenness of the emergency had outstripped the means of dealing with it.¹ It was impossible even to provide the men

¹ Though blizzards in Gallipoli were said to be unknown in November, and though this particular one was subsequently described as the severest

Nov. with warm food and drink,¹ and while the storm lasted it was equally impossible to send them away from the peninsula or for any help to arrive from outside. To make matters worse large quantities of winter clothing, which had only recently arrived at Suvla and was now so sorely needed, by cruel error had just been re-embarked.²

On the 30th November the wind abated, the frost disappeared, and for the next three weeks there was an almost unbroken spell of perfect autumn weather with the sun shining continuously, the sea a lake of turquoise, and the air like sparkling wine. But the blizzard had left its mark. At Suvla alone in the course of the three days' storm there had been more than 5,000 cases of frost-bite, and over 200 men had been drowned or frozen to death.

Dec. This was the situation when on the 1st December news arrived from Lord Kitchener that the Cabinet were still undecided on the subject of evacuation and that the orders he had issued with regard to the preliminary stage must therefore be held in abeyance. There was now no alternative but to send back to the peninsula the stores and ammunition which had already been sent away, to persevere in the landing of winter hutting, and to resume the preparations for a winter campaign.

Orders to this effect were issued accordingly. But General Monro was now more fully persuaded than ever that evacuation was the only sane course.³ To Lord Kitchener he replied that a decision by the Cabinet was very urgent. There was not a moment to lose: for winter was fast approaching, and if further delay occurred it would be equivalent to deciding against evacuation. He described the effects of the recent heavy storm and added that the Turkish bombardment of the Anzac beaches was daily increasing in intensity.

This latter statement was no exaggeration. For several

known on the peninsula for 40 years, it is noteworthy that in recent years there have been two severe November blizzards on the peninsula, one in 1922 and another in 1928.

¹ The Indian Mule Corps carried out particularly valuable services in getting up supplies to the line despite the arduous conditions. In a letter of thanks to the commanding officer General Byng placed on record that their magnificent work had excited the admiration of all ranks of the IX Corps.

² Orders had been issued for all surplus stores to be sent back to Mudros, and though an unfortunate miscalculation the first articles to be sent away from Suvla were the latest arrived consignments, which happened to be winter clothing.

³ In addition to the existing difficulties, the War Office had just telegraphed that they had heard that the Turks were about to use flame-projectors and gas on the peninsula. In point of fact, prevailing winds made the enemy's use of gas a practical impossibility.

days previous to the blizzard the enemy had treated the Anzac Nov. beach to a more sustained fire than at any previous period in the campaign, and the Lone Pine position had recently been shelled by a heavy missile which looked like a 12-inch shell.¹ Nevertheless at General Birdwood's headquarters the news that the Cabinet had not yet decided on withdrawal was received with feelings almost akin to relief. True, the situation on the peninsula was undeniably trying, and the future full of anxiety. On closer acquaintance, moreover, the military problem of withdrawal was assuming far less formidable proportions than originally anticipated; and it was easy to build up a powerful argument in favour of evacuation. But from a naval point of view the whole operation would be at the mercy of the elements. The recent heavy gale had shown how great a risk would be run in the final stage of withdrawal, and it was beginning to appear that a decision to evacuate would be an even greater gamble than a decision to stay.

Encouraging news, moreover, had just reached Imbros from the navy. Admiral Wemyss and Commodore Keyes, who had arrived on the 30th to discuss detailed plans for evacuation and to examine the extent of the havoc in Kephall Bay, had explained to General Birdwood and his corps commanders their alternative plan for an attempt to rush the Straits. They still hoped, they said, that the Government would accept this plan; they were confident it could succeed; and, if it did, they would be able to sever the enemy's communications.

Following this visit Admiral Wemyss reported on the 2nd Dec. December that the battleship *Agamemnon* had demolished three spans of the road bridge across the marshes north of Bulair. If the Turks could be prevented from repairing this bridge their difficulties in bringing up ammunition would be greatly increased, for their only other road was an unmetalled track on the eastern side of the isthmus, probably impassable in winter except by country carts. It was reasonable to hope, therefore, that the arrival on the peninsula of German heavy guns and ammunition might still be held in check, for British submarines were preventing the use of the sea route; and if a British squadron could reach the Marmara there even seemed a chance of the Turkish defence collapsing.

At home, meanwhile, the opponents to evacuation were gaining ground. Wemyss's request to be allowed to force the Straits had not, it is true, found much favour with the Government, for Admiral de Robeck had now reached England, and at a meeting of the War Committee on the 2nd December,

¹ This was probably from a naval gun.

Dec. in addition to emphasizing the hazards of the undertaking, had pointed out that, though it might be worth while if there were a definite object to be gained by it, he himself could see none. But it had now been decided that the Salonika enterprise must be abandoned at all costs, and Lord Curzon's minute had made such a vast impression that there was strong support for continuing the Gallipoli campaign. Counting on the help of four divisions to be brought from Salonika, Lord Kitchener had again changed his mind and was supporting this plan; and a new argument in favour of it was the latest news from Mesopotamia. Ill success had attended the advance on Baghdad; General Townshend was retiring on Kut, with the Turks in pursuit; and in a telegram to Monro that night Lord Kitchener explained that Townshend's failure made it "all the more imperative" that Turkey should not be allowed to claim a success on the peninsula.¹

The Cabinet, Lord Kitchener continued, had been considering the Gallipoli problem all day, and there was a strong feeling even against partial evacuation, owing to the political consequences which would follow. In any case it was the general opinion that Helles at least should be retained, but the Government now wanted to know whether, if four divisions from Salonika were sent to Monro, he could attack again at Suvla and increase the depth of his position. The navy, Lord Kitchener added, would take the offensive "in co-operation".²

Admiral Wemyss was at the same time ordered by the Admiralty to land no more troops at Salonika, and to report how long it would take to re-embark the divisions already there and bring them back to Mudros.

General Monro at once replied to Lord Kitchener that he

¹ In a memorandum to the Cabinet, dated 2nd December, other portions of which have been quoted on pp. 415 and 419, Lord Kitchener also wrote: "I would mention two points which have occurred since my report (of 22nd November) was written, which affect the situation. In the first place "it now appears possible that troops may be shortly available from Salonika," and in the second place we have now the definite knowledge of the result of "our operations at Baghdad, which I had greatly hoped would be successful "and cover to some extent the operations that we recommended. I cannot go back on the military opinion I have stated, which has not been contravened by any officer on the spot, as to the tenability of the Suvla position; "but I fully recognize that the retention of our troops there may be considered "in the light of a gamble in which our opponents hold the higher cards. It is "possible that these high cards may be badly played, and that the opportunities "our enemies possess may not be used. I could only add to what I have said "that should the Government decide to take this risk and to remain on the "peninsula, every soldier, and none more than myself, will do his utmost "to bring off the long odds which are now against us."

² Actually co-operation only meant heavy gun support, for the Admiralty had now vetoed an attempt to force the Straits.

strongly deprecated any attempt to renew the attack at Suvla. Dec. Against such a hazardous enterprise at this late juncture it was easy to marshal a host of convincing arguments, and Monro's case was strong. But Kitchener, who had just heard that the Admiralty could promise to move the troops from Salonika very quickly, again refused to rely on Monro's verdict, and again he asked for the opinions of Birdwood and Byng.

This was the situation when on the 4th December Mr. Asquith, Mr. Balfour, Lord Kitchener and Sir Archibald Murray crossed over to Calais to confer with the French Prime Minister and the French naval and military chiefs on the subject of Salonika.¹

At this meeting the French at first insisted that Salonika must be retained. If the Allies gave it up, Rumania and Greece would both join the Central Powers, and the port would become a base for German submarines. But Lord Kitchener dominated the conference. He urged that the situation at Salonika was critical, the Allied force was in great danger, and no useful purpose could be served in remaining there. As it was now too late to save Serbia, and as communication with her army could no longer be maintained, the British Government must insist on withdrawing their troops for urgent service elsewhere. These arguments seemed to win the day. Joffre remained silent, and the French Premier gave his reluctant consent to a general withdrawal.

The arrangement, however, was not allowed to stand. The following day (5th December) the French Government asked that the whole question should be re-opened. At an Allied military conference held on the 6th at Joffre's headquarters, the British representative (Sir A. Murray) found that while everyone was agreed that the Gallipoli peninsula should be completely evacuated, he alone was in favour of withdrawing from Salonika. And on the 7th the Russian Government urged that British troops should not be withdrawn from that port.²

Meanwhile General Monro, who, in point of fact, had elicited Birdwood's opinion before sending his first reply to Kitchener, had now obtained General Byng's views, and had forwarded both opinions to the War Secretary. General Birdwood was of opinion that with fresh troops and plenty of howitzer ammunition it would still be possible to advance at

¹ French representatives at the Conference: M. Briand, Admiral Lacaze, General Galliéni and General Joffre.

² It now appears that the Russian request was sent at the suggestion of the French Government. See "*Memoirs of Raymond Poincaré*" (English ed.), i. p. 315.

Dec. Suvla, and, as for landing the troops, it would be as easy (or as difficult) to land them as to attempt to evacuate the peninsula. In view of the prevalence of storms, however, the chance of success would be "a complete gamble". General Byng, too, still held to the opinion he had always given, that with more men and ammunition he could gain ground on his left. But the situation with the arrival of four divisions would be seriously complicated; the Suvla piers had lately been washed away "almost weekly"; the roads were nearly impassable after the recent heavy rain;¹ and there was not enough cover from weather for the troops already there. Neither officer, in fact, at this late season was prepared to recommend the operation.

On the 7th December the Cabinet of 22 ministers met once more. Thirty-seven days had passed since General Monro made his first report, and exactly a fortnight since the War Committee urged complete evacuation. Already the situation had been gravely imperilled by delay. There was no more time for vacillation, which could only increase the chance of dire disaster. The possible courses of action, moreover, had narrowed very considerably. To abandon Salonika and send the troops to Gallipoli would mean a break with France, and even if more troops could be sent to Gallipoli the generals on the spot were not in favour of using them. Every military authority, in England and in France, was now pressing for complete evacuation. This was the course which General Monro had never ceased to urge since the 31st October. Many members of the Government were still utterly opposed to it, but they looked in vain for an alternative.

In these circumstances the Cabinet at last made up their mind. They decided to evacuate Suvla and Anzac; but, partly for naval reasons, and partly in an effort to save an open acknowledgment of the complete wreck of the campaign, Helles was to be held for the present.

This decision was telegraphed to General Monro at Mudros, with orders that it was to be acted on without delay. A second telegram to G.H.Q. directed that if Monro was absent from headquarters the earlier message must be forwarded at once to

¹ At this time General Byng had just heard from General Peyton, commanding the 2nd Mounted Division on the right of his line, that the ground on each side of Azmak Dere was so waterlogged and so insanitary as to be practically untenable, and that he recommended that the line between Chocolate Hill and Hill 60 should be given up. General Byng replied that it must be held at all costs; and with better weather the conditions gradually improved. There can be little doubt, however, that the continued occupation of this sector throughout the winter months would have been most difficult.

General Birdwood. But here there was another hitch. The Dec. Cabinet decision had been cabled in a new cipher, of which Monro, who had just left Mudros for Salonika when the message arrived, alone had the key. So the War Office had to repeat the message in the old cipher, and it was not till the following day that Birdwood learnt its contents.

On hearing of the Government's decision Admiral Wemyss, in a telegram to the First Lord, made one final effort to induce a change of mind. But the Admiralty refused to move. For good or ill the die had been cast at last.